benefits to a larger cross section of buyers. Interested buyers under 'LSS' have been categorised as under :

1. Actual users.
2. Mini Traders.
3. Wholesale Traders.
4. General.

First preference in order booking and despatches under Liberalised Sale Scheme is being given to actual users who can draw coal for their own use in addition to the normal supplies being received by them against sponsorships/linkages. Second preference is given to the Mini Traders registered with coal companies. Mini Traders would be supplied coal upto 100 tonnes per month subject to availability after meeting the orders booked by actual users. Third preference is given to the Wholesale Traders appointed by coal companies subject to availability after meeting orders booked by first two categories. The remaining quantity if available, is allocated to other interested buyers.

**Open cast and under ground mining in the country**

1240. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA : Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that after nationalisation, the country has become more and more dependent on open cast mining ;

(b) whether it is also a fact that after another 15 years, the production from the open cost mining would down ;

(c) if so, what action Government propose to take to meet the challenge ;

(d) whether it is not a fact that in such an eventuality, the country have to depend on the production of coal from under ground mining only ;

(e) if so, what steps are being taken for augmentation of larger production from underground mining ;

(f) whether Government propose to give emphasis on under ground mining from now and hereafter ; and

(g) if not, what are the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA) : (a) to (g) The rapid growth in coal production from opencast mining after nationalisation of coal mines was mainly to meet the rising demand of various coal consuming sectors particularly the power sector. Production of coal from opencast mines is not likely to come down in another 15 years. In future also the coal production in the countary will continue to come from opencast as well as underground mines. The planning process in respect of coal development projects both underground and opencast is a continuous one. The choice of method of mining, whether opencast or underground, is generally dependent on factors like nature and geometry of coal deposit, geomining conditions and techno-ecnomic and environmental considerations. However, in order to increase production or coal particularly of superior grades greater stress is being laid on faster development of underground mines.

**Fires in Coalfield of Bihar**

1241. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA : Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that out of 70 fires identified in Jharia Coalfield of Bihar, 5 fires have completely been extinguished ;

(b) if so, what are the names of those fires and when these fires started ;

(c) what methods have been used to extinguishing each of these fires ; and

(d) how much money has been spent on extinguishing of each of these fires since their fired occurrence and till final extinction year-wise ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. As a result of efforts made by the coal company, 5 out of 70 fires identified in Jharia Coalfield of Bihar have been completely extinguished.